

Washington, D.C. – Congressman Vern Buchanan (FL-13) announced today that he will introduce legislation to impose an iron-clad moratorium on all deepwater drilling permits for both new and existing oil rigs in the Gulf of Mexico. Buchanan's legislation, to be introduced this week, will freeze permits until the cause of the explosion at Deepwater Horizon is determined by a congressional investigation.

"It is shocking and unacceptable that federal officials are still granting permits, even in the aftermath of this disaster," said Buchanan. "We need to stop issuing permits, new or otherwise, and focus on plugging the hole and cleaning up this environmental catastrophe."

In the weeks since the Deepwater Horizon explosion on April 20th, federal regulators granted at least 19 environmental waivers for drilling projects in the Gulf of Mexico and at least 17 drilling permits for existing wells, most of which were deepwater wells. These recently issued permits included "bypass" permits and "sidetrack" permits, both of which allow for new drilling to occur in deepwater.

"President Obama's move to halt permits for new oil rigs is a step in the right direction, but we must take further action to include new permits for existing wells," Buchanan said. "My legislation calls for a moratorium on all deepwater permits, for both new and existing rigs."

BP's Deepwater Horizon rig received a categorical exemption from the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). NEPA requires federal agencies to assess the environmental impact of the proposed permits. Buchanan's bill would also prohibit granting these environmental waivers to deepwater rigs until a Congressional investigation is complete.

"Safety regulations are put in place to prevent catastrophes of this nature," said Buchanan. "Circumventing these standards puts our environment and economy at risk, as evidenced by this massive spill."

The House Committee on Government Reform and Oversight recently granted a request from Buchanan to investigate why BP received a waiver from conducting environmental reviews at the Deepwater Horizon rig.

Buchanan has consistently opposed expanded drilling off the Gulf Coast, fearing that an oil spill could badly damage Florida's Gulf Coast economy and environment.